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Between THE LinesTM

Witnessing History at the White House

— An exclusive insider look from our staff on
celebrating Pride at the President's home —

By Chris Azzopardi & Sarah Bricker Hunt

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The White House decorated in rainbow colors on June 26, 2024 for a Pride celebration on the South Lawn. Photo: Chris Azzopardi



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5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

Pride Month is officially over, but there's plenty of queer summer fun on the horizon — in and out of air-conditioned spaces. Book lovers, take note of Sidetrack Bookshop's Sidetrack After Dark series, including an event featuring queer local romance writer Amanda Woody. Or, head out to Detroit Zoo's annual Pride event, Pride in the Wild, see a burlesque show at Five15 featuring "RuPaul's Drag Race All Stars" star Angeria Paris VanMichaels, go camping at a queer music fest or volunteer with Equality Michigan while showing off your trivia skills.



Meet Local Queer Author Amanda Woody

Head to Sidetrack Bookshop in Royal Oak on July 24 for a meet-and-greet with queer Detroit author Amanda Woody, the latest event in the store's Sidetrack After Dark series. Woody's new novel, "Exes & Foes," is a young adult romance sure to appeal to anyone who has been involved in a tricky dating scenario. The book follows high schoolers Emma, Caleb and Juliet, who are entangled in a confusing, dramatic, bisexual mess — the ideal setup for your next beach read on the shores of Lake Michigan. Woody will read from the book and hold a signing.

July 24, 6:30 p.m., Sidetrack Bookshop (325 S. Washington Ave., Royal Oak).



Get Wild at the Detroit Zoo

Pride in the Wild, Detroit Zoo's annual LGBTQ+ Pride event, might just be the wildest, if we take the four-legged and winged bystanders into account. The all-ages celebration features local drag performers, aerialists, DJs pumping out danceable tunes, a vendor mall, plentiful food options and more. Admission, which supports Affirmations, Ruth Ellis Center, Ferndale Pride, Camp4All, Trans Sistās of Color Project-Detroit and Free Mom Hugs-Michigan, includes a chance to explore the zoo's 125 acres, where you'll find more than 2,400 animals representing 235 species (not including the delightful humans in attendance).

July 20, 6-9 p.m., Detroit Zoo (8450 W. 10 Mile Road, Royal Oak). Reserve tickets at bit.ly/3wcM66G.



Play Trivia and Volunteer with Equality Michigan

Feeling a little lost at this point in our political unraveling? Find your people at Equality Michigan's (EQMI) LGBTQ+ Trivia and Data Entry event, set for July 11 at 6 p.m. at Affirmations, Ferndale's LGBTQ+ community center. Come for the queer-themed trivia; stay for the reminder that no matter where this roller coaster takes you this election season, hate won't win if we stick together. Bring a laptop and hang around to help EQMI log the more than 1,000 pledge-to-vote cards the organization collected during Pride Month.

July 11, 6-7:30 p.m., Affirmations (290 W. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale). Register at mobilize.us/mobilize/event/641862.



Angeria Paris VanMichaels. Photo: Ken Kwok

Catch a Burlesque Show Featuring 'RuPaul' Star Angeria

Royal Oak's Five15 will venture into the artful world of burlesque on July 12 in a collaboration with Noir Leather titled "Tease the Night: Bold, Breathtaking, Unforgettable." Performers include Angeria Paris VanMichaels from "RuPaul's Drag Race" and local legends Victoria Sanchez and Sabin. "Prepare to be enthralled by a spectacle where glamor masks enigma, and every performance is a revelation," press materials for the event read. VIP tickets include a meet-and-greet with performers and preferred seating.

July 12, 10 p.m., Five15 Media, Mojo & More (600 Washington St., Royal Oak).




Attend a Queer Music Fest and Camping Weekend

Get away for the weekend for a classic Michigan camping trip and the 3-day Saugatuck LGBT Music Fest July 19-21 at Campit Outdoor Resort in Fennville, just east of Lake Michigan beach town Saugatuck. The event features queer and ally musicians including pop singer Alisabeth von Presley, surf rockers Clovis and the Delroys, reggae artists Nikki Holland and the Dirty Elizabeths and emcee Sunny L.A. Reserve a camping spot at queer-affirmingcampitresort.com or stay at a local hotel or vacation rental — day tickets are available.

July 19-21, Campit Outdoor Resort (6635 118th Ave., Fennville). Reserve camp spots and tickets at campspot.com/book/campitoutdoorresort.

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I Was Invited to the White House for Pride. Here's Everything I Saw and Everyone I Spoke With.



Between The Lines' Editorial Director Chris Azzopardi on the South Lawn at the White House for its June 26 Pride celebration.

Exclusive insights from our Editorial Director on being at the President's home for one very affirming day

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

One sentiment shared among some LGBTQ+ people at the White House on June 26 for its Pride picnic: My younger self wouldn't believe I'd one day be here. To include Between The Lines, an invitation that came directly from the White House in early June, was more than a huge honor for our regional publication — it was an affirmation of our work in LGBTQ+ media, directly from the highest level of government. We couldn't believe *we* were here. And that message was made even more resoundingly clear when myself and our managing editor, Sarah Bricker Hunt, arrived enthusiastically to the

White House in the late afternoon on June 26. There, I spoke to many people who never imagined as a kid they'd feel this kind of official support from a presidential administration. I was one of them.

First, we filed in through the security checkpoint at the northwest gate of the White House across from Lafayette Square to receive our encoded badge. Then we entered. To be standing on the White House grounds was dreamlike. Even now as I write this, to think about how I was interviewing notable LGBTQ+ attendees about being at the White House for Pride on what is famously known as Pebble Beach, the north grounds of the White House where

television news organizations have historically broadcast their reports, doesn't quite feel real. Nor does sitting in the White House Press Briefing Room, where presidents throughout many decades have spoken to the country through our TVs about, among many human rights issues, advancing LGBTQ+ rights. When I walked up to the podium, I recalled how, in 2021, White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre made history as the first Black lesbian to lead a White House press briefing behind that mic.

Just outside that symbolic room is where "Queer Eye" star and interior designer Bobby Berk walked up to our small group of press members.

Berk told the Washington Blade that he had spoken with the Biden-Harris 2024 team the day before about "going on the road, going on the campaign trail, and maybe speaking" at the Democratic National Convention.

At Pebble Beach, when Berk approached me, his face was aglow as he spoke about the significance of being at the White House for Pride as an out gay person. "I think it's very important to be here because it's showing the world, showing America, that this administration really does care about everyone and accepts everyone, which is what America's about, which is what America was founded upon. So it's

amazing."

This year, he added, "Pride has been more about finding those people that support you," a sentiment echoed by First Lady Jill Biden, the celebration's featured speaker, when she welcomed hundreds of LGBTQ+ people to her and President Biden's iconic South Lawn, including myself: "Looking out at all of you, I see America," she said, beaming. "And it's an honor to welcome you to our home." (Though we were told initially that senior administration officials would be speaking to us at Pebble Beach, that did not materialize, and President Biden, who was preparing for the next day's debate at Camp David,

was absent.)

After interviewing reception participants, I entered the sprawling lawn (I worked up a sweat just walking to the bathroom!) through the actual White House — its halls, its doors. This was not a part of the original plan, but I think I have Deborah Cox, who performed after the First Lady gave her remarks, to thank. She unknowingly helped make this happen by arriving later than expected. Instead of exiting and reentering in the line forming outside the South Lawn, we were led by Weston Weber, a queer communications fellow instrumental in making us a part of this event, through the historic halls of the White House. To merely step through that house knowing those colonial walls I was passing by had seen so much history was almost mystical, like Dorothy being swept into Oz. Then, to be taking this walk in the White House as a gay person, felt almost defiant. And it would've been in 2020; it *could* be in 2025. That walk, I realized as I soaked up the moment and walked the White House floor with an awareness of what the next four years could be like, may not even happen.

Even though I was fortunate to have my parents' support after coming out at 18 while growing up in the Michigan suburbs, my experience at the White House mirrored, in some ways, that of Berk's as described to The Advocate — it felt like the ultimate affirmation. "To be a little gay kid from Missouri who at one point was homeless when he was 15 because he came out and his family didn't accept him, to now be here at the White House, not only being here at the White House but being invited by an administration who loves and supports us and not just us, but everyone," he said. "It's a big deal."

My own out-of-body excitement took me to new uplifting heights as I bounced around the lawn wondering, randomly, what my 8th grade government teacher might think of me being here. I couldn't snap photos of White House Pridegoers fast enough: same-sex parents playing yard games with their children, lines of people at

the many refreshments tables enjoying hot dogs (all beef) and chips, and others trying to preserve their energy in the 98-degree heat, sprawled out on blankets savoring every last moment of what would be a forever memory. The First Lady encouraged doing cartwheels on her lawn during her remarks, and even if I didn't spot anyone doing any sideways handsprings, we were all doing metaphorical flips. There was at least some fancy movement going on while Deborah Cox made the community proud by performing for the first time ever at the White House.

"I'm honored," she told me earlier in the day at Pebble Beach. "My connection and my relationship with the LGBTQ+ community goes deep. It's just been wonderful to be

“From grassroots activism to this national recognition, the path to this moment has been paved with courage and perseverance; I had to survive my agonizing teen years to get here.”

an ally, to be a support.”

Earlier in the day, I messaged my mom the livestream link. She left me this message after watching the entire event back in Michigan: "I watched the whole Pride celebration. I did look for you but couldn't find you. There were quite a few people on that lawn, but you're probably not answering the phone because you're busy doing a cartwheel. Anyways, such a special time and so proud of you and love you and and wish I could've been there, but I'm here virtually with

you, honey.”

It's possible that when she called I was off devouring hot dogs, which after I had my second, I was ready for an ice cream bar (I almost started with one, but didn't want to spoil my White House hot dog). So was everyone else. Or so I thought! It wasn't a Dreamsicle everyone was crowding around for — it was Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg and husband Chasten, a children's book author and the advisor, spokesperson and social media campaigner to Pete during his 2020 (and maybe future) presidential campaign. Tucked to the sideline, they were not eating Dreamsicles but meeting and greeting Pridegoers, engaging in brief conversation and posing for photos taken by someone from their team. The Buttigiegs live in Traverse City with their twins Penelope and Joseph, and during our encounter, when I mentioned my role at BTL, they thanked me for the work our publication does for Michigan.

High-ranking LGBTQ+ Michiganders were well-represented at the White House. I ran into Attorney General Dana Nessel and her wife, Plymouth City Commissioner Alanna Maguire, as well as Oakland County Executive Dave Coulter, Secretary of the Michigan Civil Rights Commission and Hazel Park City Councilmember Luke Londo and Erin Quetell, Oakland County's Chief Environmental Sustainability Officer. Equality Michigan Executive Director Erin Knott and Motor City Pride Chairperson Dave Wait also attended. National luminaries, as reported by The Advocate, included Jean-Pierre, Colorado Gov. Jared Polis, California U.S. Rep. Mark Takano, LGBTQ+ trailblazer Jim Obergefell, Human Rights Campaign president Kelley Robinson, rapper Da Brat and former Democratic Pennsylvania state Rep. Brian Sims.

It was a nice surprise to see "Pose" Emmy winner and vocalist Billy Porter hanging out right in front of the BTL blanket with a small group of friends and a growing



(From top to bottom) Chasten and Pete Buttigieg with BTL Editorial Director Chris Azzopardi. Azzopardi interviews former "Queer Eye" star Bobby Berk. Billy Porter poses for a photo with a fan.

See **The White House**, page 13

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Is Biden Old? Yes. Is Trump Old? Yes. But Only One of These Dudes Is a Fascist

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI



As I write this, it is July 1, 2024. The November election is four short months away. And it seems a lot of people have suddenly realized that President Biden is very old.

There is a lot of chatter about Biden's objectively terrible debate performance and calls for him to step down from major outlets like The New York Times, The New Yorker and CBS News.

And, look, I get it. He didn't exactly shine on stage. It was embarrassing. But the fact that Biden is old is, well, not new. I get that people are nervous because so much is at stake in this election. I know, I know, I say that every election, but I say it because it is always true. There are no inconsequential elections in this country. Not when the Republicans are the party of Christo-fascists and the ultra-rich.

This morning I heard on my daily news podcast "What A Day" that there are people calling for Pete Buttigieg to replace Biden on the ticket. I like Buttigieg a lot. And I'm really proud of myself right now for spelling his name right

We've already let Trump know how much he can get away with, and if you think he isn't going to take that and run with it if reelected, you are delusional.

without having to Google it. I have met him in person and he came off as very warm and sincere, and more handsome than in photographs. I actually think that he would be a good president, especially compared to Donald Trump.

But here's the thing, a vote for Biden is a vote for Buttigieg as Buttigieg is already serving in Biden's cabinet as transportation secretary. In fact, if you look at the people heading the various departments under Biden, there is absolutely no question about their abilities to do their jobs. They are all intelligent and competent people.

In fact, compared to Trump's picks when he was president,



Biden's cabinet is fucking amazing. Trump appointed sycophants and lunatics to run the government. And the results were a disaster.

Granted, a lot of us have Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Minded the Trump years because they were absolutely horrible, but Trump was a very bad president. His presidency saw us at the brink of throwing democracy in the trash. He tried to overthrow the government with his army of brainwashed MAGA extremists. You know, the ones who stormed the capital looking to kill Mike Pence and Nancy Pelosi.

I understand why people are nervous about Biden. But for all of the folks screaming that Biden should step down four months before the election, where are the people screaming for Trump to leave the race? Biden is still far and away a better President than Trump was. There is no comparison.

As I write this, the extremist Supreme Court is dismantling this country piece by piece. Trump appointed many of them. With the Supreme Court's ruling giving Trump immunity to do whatever the fuck he wants, it's clear that this is not a court that will hold Trump accountable in any way. We have already seen Trump's total disregard for the rule of law and total disrespect for the majority of the country. We've already let Trump know how much he can get away with, and if you think he isn't going to take that and run with it if reelected, you are delusional.

In fact, if you haven't peeped Project 2025 yet, do yourself a favor and get familiar with it. Because this is the blueprint

for the country if Trump is elected again. It is terrifying and something that the majority of this country does not want. The New Republic, in an article titled "Conservatives Plan to Ban Abortion and Cut LGBT Rights Starting Next January," calls Project 2025 "a remarkably detailed guide to turning the United States into a fascist's paradise." Sounds bad! Because it is.

As much as the Democratic Party can be a disappointment to those of us who really want to see meaningful progressive policies enacted, they are the only choice for any kind of progressive change to happen at all. Republicans are hot for fascism.

Fascism is defined as "a far-right, authoritarian, ultranationalist political ideology and movement, characterized by a dictatorial leader, centralized autocracy, militarism, forcible suppression of opposition, belief in a natural social hierarchy, subordination of individual interests for the perceived good of the nation or race, and strong regimentation of society and the economy."

You know, Hitler and Mussolini shit. And in case you've forgotten, LGBTQ+ people and other minorities didn't exactly thrive under fascist rule. And by "not thrive" I mean "were killed."

The fact that Trump sees these figures as people to emulate should be disqualifying. Unfortunately, it has only galvanized the most extreme and hateful people in this country. If Trump is elected again, this is where we're headed. This is not liberal hand wringing, this is factual. It's all laid out in Project 2025.

So, yes, Biden is old (though only three years older than Trump). But the choice, while not exactly exciting, is clear. Trump cannot be allowed back into the White House. Or we as a country are doomed.

THE SCROLL

QUICK HITS & CAN'T MISSES

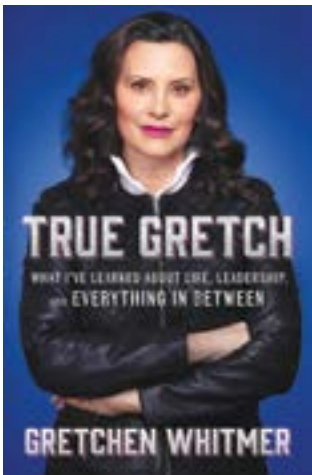
Gov. Whitmer Launches Book Tour for ‘True Gretch’ Memoir

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, Michigan’s ally-in-chief, has launched a book tour in support of her newly released memoir, “True Gretch.” The book, which details the governor’s meteoric rise to national prominence over the past several years, comes amid renewed speculation about a potential presidential run, with many pundits eager to see her jump in the ring sooner rather than later.

Gov. Whitmer has insisted she’s not running and that her work in Michigan is far from complete. That work, of course, includes her role in getting a

sweeping list of pro-LGBTQ+ legislation passed, including an amendment to the state’s civil rights act that added discrimination protections for the community. The new book, available now, outlines this fight and details the governor’s controversial Covid-era policies, her long-time abortion rights advocacy and a sexual assault she endured in 2013.

As for the tour, after a kick-off in Seattle on July 14, Whitmer will travel across the country with stops on the West and East Coasts and Michigan, where she will have a conversation with actor Jeff Daniels at the Purple Rose Theater in Chelsea on July 22, followed by visits to Michigan State University on July 23, an event in Traverse City on July 31 and a Detroit event to be announced later.



Ride ‘Em, Cowboy: Michigan’s Contribution to Queer Porn Culture

A new study from Pornhub and Pride.com digs deep into gay porn trends, revealing some expected results: 1. Gay porn is very popular and 2. The country can agree on at least one thing and that’s the category “bareback,” which is the far-and-away most popular choice, coast-to-coast.

Less expected are some distinct regional variations, including the popularity of “Grandpa Jerks” in Tennessee and “Nude Mirror” in Georgia. Here in the Mitten, it’s all about that farm life, apparently. One of the most popular Michigan gay porn searches is simply “Farmer,” similar to states like Minnesota, Wyoming and New Jersey, where “Farm Hand,” “Vintage Cowboys” and “Country Boys” are popular viewer choices.



Don’t Miss Late Summer Michigan Prides

As Between The Lines has reported, Michigan Pride 2024 has broken the meter once again, with more festivals appearing on our calendar than ever before — more than 50! It’s no surprise that organizers can no longer fit all those events into a single month without sacrificing attendance to neighboring Pride fests. It’s great news for every Pride lover, especially those who love a good road trip. Don’t miss the remaining events on

- our annual calendar, which you can find at pridesource.com/article/2024-michigan-pride-calendar:
- July 13 — Canton Pride OUTside. Heritage Park, 6:30-8:30 p.m.
 - July 14 — South Lyon. McHattie Park, 12-4 p.m.
 - July 18-21 — Battle Creek Pride Weekend. Festival July 20, Leila Arboretum, 12-8 p.m.
 - July 26-27 — Royal Oak. Downtown Royal Oak, July 26, 3-11 p.m., July 27 11 a.m.-11 p.m.
 - July 26-28 — Hotter Than July. Various locations and times.
 - Aug. 3 — Allegan. Riverfront Plaza, 1 p.m.

- Aug. 3 — Meridian Township. Marketplace on the Green, 5-10 p.m.
- Aug. 10 — Ann Arbor. Liberty and Main, 12 p.m.
- Aug. 17 — Mount Clemons. Downtown Mount Clemons, 12 -6 p.m.
- Aug. 17 — Vermontville Youth Pride. 108 N. Main St., 12-7 p.m.
- Aug. 24 — Transgender Pride in the Park. Martin Road Park, Ferndale, 12-6 p.m.
- Sept. 19-22 — Mackinac Island. Details TBA.
- Sept. 26-29 — Traverse City (Up North Pride). Various locations and times.

Affirmations Art Exhibit Features Global Inspiration

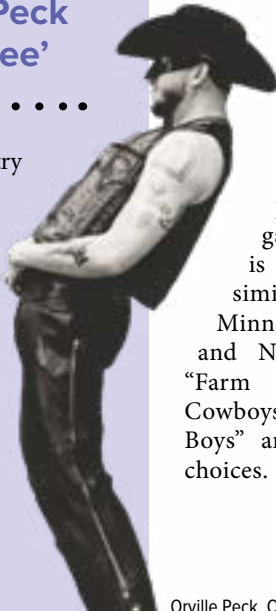
A new exhibit at Affirmations features the work of Babar “Bobby” Ahmad, whose art focuses on global stories that bring people together. Ahmad uses metallic shades to symbolize cultural connection and to introduce global influences to audiences everywhere. “Beyond Boundaries” will be on display in the Pittman/Puckett Gallery starting July 15, with an opening reception on July 19 from 5-9 p.m. Learn more at goaffirmations.org.

Get Ready for the Aug. 6 Primary

A voter guide for Michigan’s Aug. 6 primary is now live at Vote411.org/Michigan. Created by MLive Media Group and the League of Women Voters of Michigan Education Fund, the guide offers information on state and federal races, local ballot proposals and more. Voters can enter their address at Vote411.org/Ballot for personalized ballot details. Candidate responses are unedited except for length, and the guide is available in Spanish.

Kesha and Orville Peck Collab on ‘Tennessee’

Pop icon Kesha and queer country singer Orville Peck are getting in on a rising trend with “Tennessee,” a twangy, Dolly-inspired collaborative track that plays over the final sequence of “Stud Country,” a short L.A. Times documentary focused on LGBTQ+ cowboy culture and line dancing. The track is only available in the doc for now (youtu.be/PSbfv9982ek) — it’s worth a watch!



Orville Peck. Courtesy photo

Michigan Pride Lights Up the White House Lawn

Reflections from Michiganders who made the trip for the First Lady's Pride celebration



(Above) Pete Buttigieg, with husband Chasten by his side, meets and greets admirers at the White House's Pride celebration on June 26. (Right) Luke Londo, Alanna Maguire, Dave Coulter, Dana Nessel and Erin Quetell. Photos: Chris Azzopardi

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

Michigan was well-represented on the White House South Lawn at the 2024 Pride celebration, though the state's invited legislators were missed as they stayed in town, working under deadline to get the annual budget in shape. Still, many other queer and ally Michiganders from across the state made the trek to take part in the festivities.

Motor City Pride chairperson Dave Wait, who attended with his husband, told BTL the event was an unforgettable experience. "Seeing the White House strongly

committed to celebrating diversity and inclusion during Pride Month was inspiring," he said. "It was a powerful reminder of how far we've come and the importance of fighting for equality and acceptance."

Attendee Erin Quetell, Oakland County Chief Environmental Sustainability Officer, who attended with Oakland County Executive Dave Coulter, said the last time she'd been to Washington, D.C. was in 2009 for the National Equality March. "That experience of marching to fight for basic rights to standing on the White House lawn celebrating Pride

was very moving," she reflected. "I couldn't help but feel honored and appreciated while looking up at the rainbow pillars of the White House. I am optimistic that us changemakers are going to continue to push and fight for equity and equality for everyone."

Secretary of the Michigan Civil Rights Commission and Hazel Park City Councilmember Luke Londo said that the experience was one of the most affirming of his life. "Hosting Pride at the location that embodies the power of the presidency, and our entire



system of government, conveyed a recognition of the civil rights and inherent dignity of the LGBTQ+ community in a way that no other event or proclamation could," he said. "When First Lady Dr. Jill Biden told attendees, 'This is your home, too,' it embodied the principle of the White House being 'The People's House' in a way that felt tangible and real to me for the first time. The sense of community among attendees,

with our shared identity and similar struggles, while looking at the columns of the White House decked out in Pride colors, is honestly something I'll always cherish."

"At one point during the celebration I was FaceTiming my wife and greatest ally, Madelyn, who was with our 21-month-old son," Londo added. "It felt like we were all there, together, for what I can only describe as one of the greatest experiences of my life. She has supported me in all of my endeavors, especially on the Michigan Civil Rights Commission and Hazel Park City Council, and nothing I have accomplished would be possible without her and others in my corner."

Fair Michigan President and Plymouth City Commissioner Alanna Maguire, who attended with her wife, Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel, said she was honored to attend the Pride event. "It was a joyous event, as all Prides are, because Pride is essentially a celebration of love and the freedom of expression," she said. "Seeing the White House columns from the South Lawn striped in rainbow colors was a very moving experience. Having a president who supports the LGBTQ community is paramount to maintaining and expanding LGBTQ civil rights in this country."

Also in attendance were Michigan's favorite U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg and his husband, Chasten, who have a home in Traverse City. The couple graciously took photo after photo with fans (and, perhaps, future President Buttigieg voters).

number of queer admirers who recognized him. He was organizing his own meeting line, prioritizing his hellos on a first-come-first-serve basis and taking photos in sets: first was “smile,” second was “serve.” When I asked him how being there felt as we geared up to a precarious election that would likely come down to Donald Trump and President Biden, he was plain-spoken, expressing the importance of learning from history and the need to remember the struggles and victories of the past while also emphasizing the significance of voting and democracy.

“We stand on the shoulders of

giants who already did this,” he told me. “What’s the fear about? Love always wins. We’ve been in a progressive circle for 60 years. We forgot the fight. Go back. They stopped teaching history in public schools on purpose. Nobody remembers. Nobody remembers. Just Google the fucking civil rights movement. Bitch, look at some shit. We did this already. None of it is new. Show up and show out, the end. And vote. Why are we still talking about that even? Why are we still talking about voting? That’s a no-brainer to me. The choice is democracy or not. That’s right, period. Thank you.”

In regards to what this particular Pride celebration at the White House represented just months before the election, he said, “It’s community. It’s a call to action. It’s

a reminder of our power. Fear not, the change has already happened. This is not the time to be scared or terrified. Those words need to be stricken from the lexicon. It’s time to fight. We did this already.”

To process the uncertainty, he told me he leans on the wise words of civil rights icon John Lewis: “I just put one foot in front of the other and refuse to give up like John Lewis told me.”

As I write this, I’m still processing my own complicated feelings about the country’s future and seeing that debate in my D.C. hotel (you know the one) while being at the White House just 24 hours beforehand; what I can say right now is that there are big emotions about what simply being there symbolizes to me as a gay person and journalist, which is a profound shift in

societal recognition, equality and acceptance. For a gay person, such an invitation represents a milestone in my personal journey and a significant moment in the broader struggle for LGBTQ+ rights. The White House is not just any venue; it is the residence and office of the President of the United States, a symbol of the nation itself. Being in attendance that day among my community sends a powerful message of inclusion and equality, but the First Lady also sent that message directly, addressing the most vulnerable members of our community — the transgender population — who need our steadfast support and solidarity. “I hope all of you feel that freedom and love on the South Lawn today,” she said in her remarks, “because your home is here too.”

Back in Michigan, going through the photos I took that you see on this page, I found myself reflecting on the decades-long journey that brought me here, to my role as the Editorial Director of this LGBTQ+ publication. From grassroots activism to this national recognition, the path to this moment has been paved with courage and perseverance; I had to survive my agonizing teen years to get here. Being at the White House, witnessing history in the making, reaffirms my commitment to amplifying LGBTQ+ voices and advancing our collective cause and the promise of working toward a future where every individual can live authentically and proudly.

A future in which we can always, in 2025 and beyond, call the White House “home.”



Joy and Fear as Marriage Equality Hits 9-Year Mark

Jim Obergefell reflects on fate of historic marriage ruling



Jim Obergefell. Courtesy photo

BY JIM OBERGEFELL

Our nation marked nine years of marriage equality on June 26, 2024. As one of more than 30 plaintiffs in the U.S. Supreme Court case that affirmed same-sex couples' right to marry, this anniversary should have filled me with nothing but joy. I did experience joy, but also foreboding — a fear that Obergefell v. Hodges might not survive to its 10th anniversary.

Over these nine years, hundreds of thousands of couples have married, and thousands of families have formed. Whether they want marriage or not, queer people see a future that includes them. A young woman once told me that, if it weren't for Obergefell v. Hodges, she would have committed suicide. She found a reason to keep living in that court decision, rather than end her life, and countless others undoubtedly found hope when before they had none.

Marriage equality brought dignity, security and a sense of belonging to people across our nation. Regardless of the outrageous claims made by opponents, no religious leader has been jailed for refusing to officiate, and opposite-sex couples haven't stopped marrying or having children. Their dire claims of the fall of society have, unsurprisingly, proven to be just as hollow as their claims of loving their neighbors as themselves.

It is foolish to believe the right to marry is safe, especially because the U.S. Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade in 2022

with their Dobbs decision, eliminating the constitutional right to abortion. This was the first time in our nation's history the court rescinded a right instead of affirming one. This court has turned its back on its bedrock principle of precedent because of personal attitudes, not law. Justices Thomas and Alito have made it clear that they will overturn Obergefell v. Hodges. It isn't a question of if a case to overturn marriage equality will make it to the Supreme Court, but when.

What is at the heart of opposition to

“It isn't a question of if a case to overturn marriage equality will make it to the Supreme Court, but when.”

marriage equality and LGBTQ+ equality in general? What motivates the extreme hatred toward the transgender community? Why is the LGBTQ+ community targeted

See **Obergefell**, page 26



First Lady Jill Biden gives remarks during the Pride celebration at the White House on June 26. Photo courtesy of The White House

My Existential Dread Took a Hit Thanks to Jill Biden’s Pride Speech

Hope springs eternal on the South Lawn



BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

In retrospect, attending the White House Pride celebration one day before the “debate” (if we’re calling it that) was a little like playing fiddle as Rome burned. And it felt like it, roasting in the 105-degree heat index on the South Lawn. But the event also couldn’t have been better timed, for me or the country.


Here I stood in the shadow of our nation’s most famous residence, months before (yet another) “most important election of our lives,” a lengthy list of hard-fought victories behind us and a lengthy list of terrifying what-ifs to come. I don’t know about you, but I’m already losing sleep and we haven’t even made it to the conventions.

What if this clearly compromised Supreme Court sends Obergefell back to the states, as though basic human equality should be left up to the whims of political figures beholden to voters who have been fully taken by relentless propaganda from the decreasingly far right? What if federal

employment and housing protections are dissolved? What if all the LGBTQ+ parents I know who have created their families through “non-traditional” means are at risk, again, of losing their children and their parental rights? What if my kids suffer unthinkable consequences in a culture war aimed squarely at their well-being? I could go on (and I often do these days — sorry, friends, who I used to have a lot more fun with when I was blissfully detached from politics).

June 26, though, was a day to set aside the what-ifs. Despite my pre-trip handwringing, it wasn’t all that difficult. A (very) thorough security check followed by suddenly finding yourself in the White House’s James S. Brady Press Briefing room — the one on TV! — will do that. I admit, I was feeling a little intimidated in this space where Pulitzer-winning journalists and household names have grilled presidents and world leaders, but here’s a fun secret that has proven true many times in my life: People are just, well, people. Within 15 minutes of waiting in that briefing room,


See **Jill Biden**, page 18



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Karine Jean-Pierre, First Out Black Queer White House Press Secretary, on Why Representation Matters

The Biden-Harris Administration ‘will never stop fighting to end discrimination,’ she says



Karine Jean-Pierre. Photo: White House / Cameron Smith

BY KARINE JEAN-PIERRE

Last year, I took a question in the briefing room from a young Black girl who was visiting the White House for “Take Your Child to Work Day.” I could tell she was nervous, but she quickly composed herself, asked her question (what’s the most difficult part about my job?), and

told me that she aspired to be in my shoes one day. As the first Black and openly queer person to hold the position of White House press secretary, this moment reinforced for me that representation matters. It matters to our kids, and makes our nation stronger. When I was young, I never dreamed I would be speaking on behalf of the president of the United States, let alone a president and

vice president who encourage me to show up and serve every day as my full, authentic self.


I try to honor the people that came before me and always remember I didn’t get here on my own. When it was my turn to continue the tradition of naming a new lectern in the Press Briefing Room, I took the opportunity to honor the legacies of Alice Dunnigan and Ethel Payne, the first two Black women to join the White House press corps. The candidness with which they shared the reality of being Black women reporters in the ’40s and ’50s gives me the courage to be open about my own journey.

I was fortunate to grow up in New York City, one of the most diverse places in the world, but even that environment couldn’t shield me from feeling alone and sometimes invisible. My family emigrated from Haiti and brought with them the values they knew. Simply put, queer identities weren’t something to be acknowledged in any form at home, much less celebrated.

But in time, my family came to the same realization that other families come to at dinner tables across America — who you love doesn’t change who you are, what your passions are, or the mark you work to make on the world.

That is the American Dream that LGBTQI+ Americans should have the freedom to pursue. We have a long way to go but the work is worth it. Those behind us are depending on it.

Now more than ever, our community faces the scary reality with each new bang of a gavel or stroke of a pen that the hard-won rights we have secured in recent years remain under relentless attack. A record number of anti-LGBTQI+ bills — over 600 in 2023 alone — were filed in statehouses across the country. For 2024, that record was on track to be shattered before the end of Pride Month. Across the nation, we are seeing a spike in book bans that disproportionately remove books about LGBTQI+ communities and communities of color. It’s wrong.




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The Highest Lesbian
Puzzle can be found on page 25

That’s why we must continue to speak up and call out attacks on our fundamental freedoms. The freedom to be who you are and love who you love. The freedom to access medical treatment and gender-affirming care. And the freedom to show up in all spaces regardless of how you identify.

For me, that freedom set me on the path to speak up from the most powerful lectern in the world — and have the privilege of doing it for a president that evolved just like my family did, setting an example for the rest of America in the process.

In a 2012 appearance on “Meet the Press,” then-Vice President Biden was asked about his well-documented opposition to same-sex marriage. But this time, something had changed. In an ever-changing news cycle, it was a clear indicator of progress that made the nation stop and listen.

“I am absolutely comfortable with the fact that [same-sex couples] are entitled to the same exact rights... And quite frankly, I don’t see much of a distinction beyond that,” Biden said.

The entire exchange with anchor David Gregory took just three minutes, but the matter-of-fact way Joe Biden validated my existence and those of countless other queer Americans moves me to this day.

Now as president, he has transformed the sentiment shared that day into structural change, driving his administration to advance equality for our community and protect civil rights here at home. Thanks to his leadership, we are combating dangerous and cruel practices of so-called “conversion therapy,” implementing a new national strategy to end the HIV epidemic, and ending the disgraceful practice of banning gay and bisexual men from donating blood.

But I know that despite these strides, many in my community across the country, LGBTQI+ youth especially, unfortunately still feel the same loneliness and invisibility I once did. For those who are struggling, the president and his administration launched the 988 line to help — and we have a line dedicated to serving LGBTQI+ young people that can be reached by dialing 988 and pressing 3. Please know that you are loved exactly as you are and that we will always have your back.

The Biden-Harris administration will never stop fighting to end discrimination within our borders and around the globe, to stand against the avalanche of unjust state laws that aim to legalize hate, and to guarantee everyone the fundamental right and freedom to be who they are.

Karine Jean-Pierre is the Assistant to the President and White House Press Secretary.

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every one of us was taking turns standing at the podium to get our picture taken in the exact same spot where every president since 1970 has stood to communicate with the American people. I even sat in Helen Thomas’s seat in the front row! I’d like to think we were all reminded of what got us into this unglamorous profession in the first place (hint: it wasn’t Google Analytics or the prospect of reading Facebook comments under our article posts).

Because despite the moment in which we find ourselves, and the countless bad ways this could all turn out, and despite the insistence from the right that this is not our country, too, there we were in the literal White House, contemplating the promise of a once-great nation that could actually be great, again — for everyone — if we can just get our shit together. We’ve done it before, and in this moment, it felt like we could do it again.



BTL Managing Editor Sarah Bricker Hunt is escorted from inside the White House to the South Lawn for the Pride party. Photo: Chris Azzopardi

Once we were led through the White House and out the doors to the South Lawn, where the party was in full swing, the crowd turned to see who was coming

through the imposing double doors. I had to chuckle — it was just a small group of tired, cynical journalists from regional publications pretending not to be

impressed, after all — and soon enough, we were mingling with a happy crowd bustling with people of all ages and backgrounds, united in a passion for equity

and progress. And later, when Jill Biden delivered her remarks, it felt like no matter what, we’d all get through it together, and maybe even come out stronger on the other side.

“Today, we’re here to find joy, to feel at home, to be free. To say loud and clear that you belong, that you are beautiful, that you are loved...” she said. “When you leave here, to go back into a place that still needs so much change, take that with you. Let it be a reminder that you don’t face these battles alone. You are never alone.”

I suppose that’s the reason I’ve been driven to write since I was a little kid — to try and make people feel less alone. The First Lady’s speech was a well-timed reminder that, ultimately, this publication exists with that very goal in mind. A reader recently told me that Between The Lines feels like a family newsletter to her. I love that sentiment because no matter where the chips may fall, when you have a family that loves the real you, the things that truly matter will always remain.

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It seems like there's news about the U.S. Supreme Court nearly every day. But what doesn't get nearly enough attention is the Michigan Supreme Court – and the fact that we, the people, have the power to elect our Supreme Court. Michigan is one of just 24 states that lets voters decide who sits on the highest court in the state. And every Michigander should know how the process works and why it matters.

This November, Michiganders get to choose who fills two spots on the court. This is an important civic duty and an opportunity to shape this vitally important institution. The Michigan Supreme Court is the guardian of justice, fairness, and freedoms for all Michiganders. The seven-person court makes decisions that touch every aspect of our lives, from civil rights and criminal justice to environmental protection and economic regulations.

Chances are, you know what's at stake in the next few years: reproductive rights, abortion laws, gun safety, and fair elections – and there's no telling what other issues may come before the court. The Michigan Supreme Court makes the ultimate decisions on the most challenging legal cases in the state, which require thoughtful, insightful, and robust deliberation to help ensure a fair outcome.

In Michigan, Supreme Court candidates are nominated by a political party, but their party affiliation is not included on the ballot. The justices are elected for eight-year terms, which means the votes you cast this year will make a difference for nearly a decade.

Plenty of Michiganders like to check the straight-party box, which is just fine – but don't stop there. To cast your vote for the Supreme Court candidates of your choice, you have to keep going to the non-partisan section of your ballot. You can't miss it. Get to know the candidates in advance, then mark the ballot to vote for the two people you think will do the best job of ensuring a strong, equitable future for our state.

Being a Michigan Supreme Court justice requires integrity, fairness, and a strong understanding of the law. In fact, candidates must be a licensed Michigan lawyer for at least five years. The Michigan Supreme Court is one of the three equal branches of our state government, along with the Legislature and Governor. Michigan voters have the privilege of choosing who is appointed to all three branches – and it's an important responsibility.

Remember: Don't stop at the top! Go all the way down the ballot to cast your vote for the two Michigan Supreme Court candidates of your choice. Your vote counts in every race, so make sure your voice is heard in this one, too.

Want to know more about the Michigan Supreme Court, the voting process, or how to spread the word about the importance of electing the people who will sit on our state's highest court? Visit

www.MISupremeCourtRocks.com to get all the information you need to play your part in this important part of this year's election.

-Erin Knott, Equality Michigan Executive Director



Detroit's Baddie Brooks Makes History at NYC Pride March

Brooks is the first Black trans woman from Detroit to serve as Grand Marshal



Raquel Willis, Baddie Brooks and Michelle Visage. Photo: Kaitlyn Plummer

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

Detroit's own Baddie Brooks repped Michigan like the talented boss bitch she is at the annual New York City Pride March on June 30, where she served as a Grand Marshal alongside luminaries like activist-author Raquel Willis and veteran "RuPaul's Drag Race" judge Michelle Visage.

Brooks, a classically trained musician who graduated from Eastern Michigan University, has had a busy Pride season in 2024, performing at Pride fests in Ypsilanti, Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo and soon, Ann Arbor Pride, set for Aug. 3. Never content to stand still for long, Brooks just released "Nails," a high-energy dance track, too.

Brooks recently connected with BTL to talk about her experience in NYC, how she feels about trans leaders who have blazed a trail before her and becoming a trans role model herself to the next generation.

You just made history as the first Black transgender woman from Detroit to serve as a Grand Marshal in the New York City Pride March. How are you feeling about the experience?

It was incredible. And yes, I was able to serve as a youth Grand Marshal mainly for my advocacy in music regarding queer and transgender people. I performed at the NYC Youth Pride Festival on the 29th and then the parade was on the 30th, and it was a life-changing experience. I'm thankful to Borealis Philanthropy for sponsoring my travel.

Can you give us some behind-the-scenes insights into what it was like to be there?

I was able to meet huge giants in the community, like Miss Major, who was part of the Stonewall uprising, Michelle Visage and Raquel Willis, and what was really cool is that although they have such a huge status not only in the LGBTQIA community but also in the world in general, they are very down-to-earth and genuine. Michelle Visage said hi to me before I did, and I was nervous. I was like, "It's Michelle Visage!"

But we were both getting our makeup done — my makeup artist, Isaiah, was amazing — but we were in each other’s peripheral view and she looked at me and waved, and I was like “I know Michelle Visage is not waving at me right now.” But I waved back and she mentioned just getting off the phone with RuPaul, just casually.

Raquel was also so friendly, and I was able to mention how much of an honor it was to be able to connect with both of them at that moment, and I asked for a picture. They were both really kind to me.

How important has it been for you as someone in your early 20s to see representation in trans advocates like Raquel Willis, who made history when she spoke at the D.C. Women’s March in 2017?

As a young trans woman, I am definitely very inspired following this weekend. It has made me want to continue to push for change within my community and in the world and to continue to advocate for my community, especially in today’s current political climate. We must push for more protections for trans and queer youth, especially, and as someone in the youth category, I want to continue to push for those protections myself as I transition into my mid-20s.

Your new single and the music video is literally about getting your nails done before going out. Why did you focus on that experience?

“Nails” is very upbeat and electric and it’s for anyone who literally enjoys wearing nails, but I also wrote the song when I was going through some difficult things in life. I reflected on things that I quite literally enjoyed doing, and just getting nails and going out with friends, it’s something I enjoy doing. So I was like, “Why not write an anthem centered around that?” I feel like anyone can be able to enjoy the song just because of the musicality behind it, too — I played my own trumpet and euphonium lines. I feel like any audience member can enjoy it because it’s such an upbeat song.

You played these instruments as a student at Eastern Michigan University. Are you still playing

with any local ensembles?

Yes. I’ve been playing trumpet since the fifth grade, since the age of 9, and I’m 24 now, so throughout middle school and during high school at Belleville High School and then at EMU, where I was involved in the wind symphony and the jazz ensemble, where I sang. These days, I sometimes play with The Better Things Collective in the Detroit area.

As you enter this next phase of your life, you’re at an interesting age where people are now coming up behind you, looking to you as a role model. Do you feel pressure being in that position?



The interactions that I have with younger people usually happen at my shows. I have some music that is centered around adult tastes and music I can perform for family-friendly occasions, and those shows are where most of my engagement with younger people happens.

I don’t feel pressure at all. It actually feels more motivational and also inspiring in that regard, because if I’m being honest, I never imagined myself in this position when I was younger. I never even imagined coming out, at all. So to actually be able to be a representative and an advocate for my community and to be the first Black trans woman from Detroit to be a Grand Marshal, it really moves me and pushes me to want to work even harder to be successful and to push for change for my community.

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Samantha Irby Is ‘Dying’ ... of Appreciation

Bestselling author — and subject of Ann Arbor Library’s Big Gay Read — on feeling seen and what she thinks about the library’s Samantha Irby Experience

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

I’m somehow 30 minutes late calling Samantha Irby, despite all the careful planning and near-stalker behavior I engaged in to get her on my calendar. Months of planning right into the toilet all because I entered the end time into the start time slot on our Google Calendar invite.

I sheepishly send her a text, all apologies and with a pledge to open my calendar to any time she can manage, silently giving myself a stern lecture about attention to detail, when she replies. “OH SHIT LET’S TALK NOW” she writes, followed by, “i gotta find my phone omg” and “i knew i was fucking something up.” I knew we were soulmates the last time we talked, but this really seals it. I suddenly have new hope about how I’ll get by in this world, once I grow up, or maybe even if I never do. I’ve fallen for her all over again before we’re even on the phone, and it’s no surprise, really — Irby earns her living on this brand of inspiration born of relatability.

Because we’ve all been there, but admitting it, and wrapping it up in a charmingly crafted anecdote, is where Irby’s genius lies, whether she’s penning best-selling memoirs like “We Are Never Meeting in Real Life,” the inspiration for this year’s Big Gay Read, hosted by the Ann Arbor District Library, or contributing as a writer on shows like “And Just Like That...” and “Shrill.” Readers respond to true authenticity, and Irby is dripping with the stuff.

I spoke to Irby just ahead of her visit to the library as part of the Big Gay Read and a series of events titled collectively as the Samantha Irby Experience with a central, burning question I’d had since library staffers Rich Retyi and Jacob Gorski filled me in on what we could expect,

“I’m about to burst into tears. This is an incredible dream. This is all incredible. It’s like someone dipped into my subconscious and made my dream list of activities.”

— Samantha Irby

including a craft event centered on cat butt coasters and a group Zumba session: Could she imagine anything more delightful and



Samantha Irby signs books at the Ann Arbor District Library on July 7. Photo: Lia Giannatti

equally terrifying than an entire month focused on what it means to be Samantha Irby?

“I am dying,” she tells me. “After two days, they’re all gonna be, ‘OK enough of this.’”

Irby says she’s especially excited about the humorous irony of the book selection. “The beauty here, of talking about this book, is it’s like I am going to see people, but I said we’re never going to meet. But... here I am! Really, though, I’m excited. I feel

good, and I love Ann Arbor.”

Irby says Ann Arbor reminds her of her hometown, Evanston, Illinois, just north of Chicago. “You get that hippie college, granola, progressive vibe, which makes me feel right at home,” she says. Irby has lived across the state in Kalamazoo for several years with her wife Kirsten Jennings and stepkids.

See **Samantha Irby**, page 24

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Samantha Irby

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Irby wasn't sure who might come to her talk on July 7, or how they'd react to her relentlessly authentic prose. "You never know who shows up to library events," she muses. "What kind of people will be there? Will they be scandalized? I'm anxious to see how that plays out, though I'm already familiar with the archetypes of people who will be there, but if they have good energy, I'm sure they'll go along on the ride with me. However, I also have some friends coming, so just in case everyone hates me, my friends will laugh loudly."

Due to "insane self-consciousness," Irby hadn't looked over the list of events for the Big Gay Read, and I was more than happy to get her real-time reaction to what the library has in store for participants. She was especially enthusiastic about the Cat Craft Symposium, where patrons can create their own cat butt coaster and cat toys (set for July 18). "Oh my god, can they send me one?" she asks.

As I read through the event descriptions for events like the Zumba class (July 11) and the Bad Date Cabaret (July 23), clearly dreamt up by sincere and well-versed fans, Irby roared with laughter and appreciation. "My god," she said. "I'm about to burst into tears. This is an incredible dream. This is all incredible. It's like someone dipped into my subconscious and made my dream list

of activities. Hat's off to whoever came up with these activities and events."

"This is an incredible honor. Just having the library pick my book was beyond anything I could imagine, but then a month of stuff that I would like doing... wow. I'm thrilled and humbled that anyone would even consider coming to hear me being big and gay."



Samantha Irby at the downtown Ann Arbor District Library on July 7. Photo: Lia Giannotti

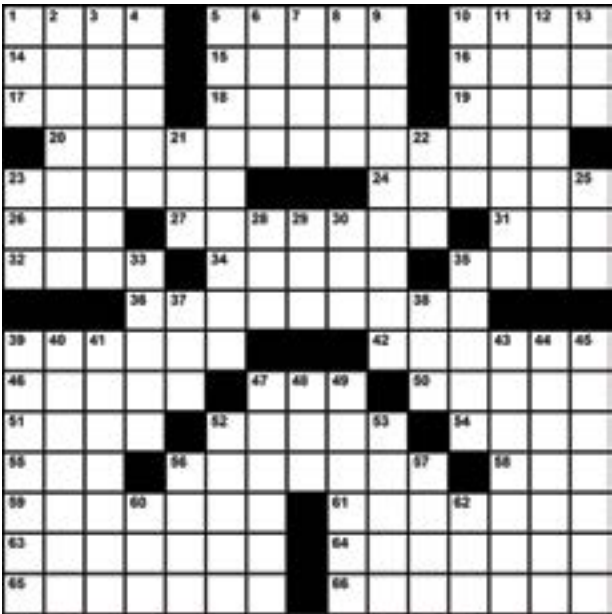
Borrow your copy of "We Are Never Meeting in Real Life" at Ann Arbor District Library and learn more about the Big Gay Read at aadl.org/thebiggayread.

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The Highest Lesbian

Across

- 19 inches, e.g.
- 5 Not a single person
- 10 Oral attention getter
- 14 Denial for Nanette
- 15 "Rubber Capital of the World"
- 16 Go down (on)
- 17 Trent of Mississippi

- 18 Winter driving hazard
- 19 Elusive craft
- 20 Upcoming movie about a lesbian astronaut
- 23 "I, Robot" author
- 24 Nureyev's homeland
- 26 Like Abner, before Viagra?
- 27 Splinter groups that go either way?
- 31 Officer in the navy (abbr.)
- 32 "Ed Wood" role
- 34 Lover of Dali, perhaps
- 35 Vet, of a sort, for short
- 36 Subject of the movie

- 39 Retro emporium
- 42 As a surprising fact
- 46 Make easy to swallow
- 47 Straight to gay (abbr.)
- 50 Event where people get physical
- 51 Infamous Idi
- 52 Speed skater Ohno
- 54 Tear apart
- 55 Money back from Intl. Male
- 56 Leo Varadkar's country
- 58 Govt. broadcaster
- 59 With 61-Across, thespian who will play the lesbian
- 61 See 59-Across
- 63 Milk component
- 64 Coastal critter
- 65 She loved Franklin and Lorena
- 66 Fitting quality

Down

- 1 Kate McKinnon's old show
- 2 Dustin Hoffman's cross-dressing role
- 3 Mound ruled by a queen
- 4 Tribal symbol
- 5 Musical TV drama with Will Lexington
- 6 Abbreviated Broadway musical
- 7 Hersher of baseball
- 8 Coward of "The Scoundrel"
- 9 Perform on Broadway, e.g.
- 10 They are butt sex toys
- 11 Making love on a strongbox?
- 12 Dozing audibly
- 13 It takes balls to make them in

- the NFL
- 21 Leftover from preparing for cornhole
- 22 Greek consonants
- 23 Vestment for Mychal Judge
- 25 Sophie B. Hawkins' "___ Lay Me Down"
- 28 Bernstein's fifth
- 29 Trick ending
- 30 "Suzie Q" band, for short
- 33 Navratilova's winter home
- 35 Lurer of phallic fish
- 37 Very hairy swinger
- 38 ___ Perignon
- 39 Shine, like Liberace's rings
- 40 Concerning a bone in the arm
- 41 Opening of the body
- 43 Get it up
- 44 Men of La Mancha
- 45 Gives Valium to
- 47 First game of a doubleheader
- 48 Tammy Baldwin, for example
- 49 It's in the blood
- 52 Playground retort
- 53 Coming soon
- 56 "Blame ___ The Bossa Nova"
- 57 Result of getting rear-ended
- 60 Castro Street, on BART
- 62 White as a ghost

See p. 16 for answers

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Obergefell

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with hate and discrimination? In a word: religion.

Just as with interracial marriage, opponents of marriage equality used religious belief to justify bans on same-sex marriage. They conflated holy matrimony — a ceremony blessed by a faith leader in a house of worship — with marriage, a civil right requiring a government-issued license but no religious ceremony. They declared that the sole purpose of marriage is procreation, a claim refuted by the lack of bans on marriage between those who are unable to conceive or who are past childbearing age.

Some religious believers frequently point to seven Bible passages they say condemn homosexuality to justify anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric and hate, although same-sex attraction and pairing occur throughout the animal kingdom. Transgender people are attacked because some believers say their God created only two sexes, ignoring the scientific fact that people are born with both male and female genitalia or differing numbers of sex chromosomes.


Louisiana law now requires all schools

to display the Ten Commandments, and Oklahoma law requires all schools to teach the Bible. Both laws are obvious religious indoctrination rooted in a superiority complex, the feeling that only Christian beliefs and traditions are acceptable, moral and just. This is not religious freedom — it is preference given to one religion over all others in the law and a complete mockery of the religious freedom our founders enshrined in the Constitution.


No Christian has been prevented from practicing or teaching their faith in their home or house of worship. No Christian has been arrested or denied their rights because of their beliefs. That is religious freedom, not the perverted version being pushed by a minority.

Every person deserves a place in We the People, but that will happen only when our nation's elected officials and judiciary accurately reflect who we are as a people. We can achieve that lofty goal only when every voter votes in every election. Doing otherwise results in what we have now: a Supreme Court unwilling to affirm equal justice under law to all, regardless of religious belief.

We must do better as citizens of this nation. If we don't, I fear not only marriage equality but our democracy itself will come to an end.



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